

PANDEMIC (H1N1) 2009: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A SUPERINTENDENT'S RESOURCE

Prevention

Q. Should students or staff showing symptoms stay home?

A. Students/staff/children who become ill at home with ILI should stay at home until they are symptom free and are feeling well and able to fully participate in all normal day to day school activities (e.g., intra/extramural activities and school trips).

Q. What should we do to prevent the spread of H1N1?

A. To prevent the transmission of infection, schools should

1. **Promote and model basic infection control practices** such as respiratory etiquette, and frequent hand cleaning:

If ill, stay home from work, school and avoid public places. Seek medical attention if symptoms progress.

One of the best ways to prevent influenza is to get the influenza vaccine every year. A vaccine for the pandemic H1N1 influenza virus is expected to be available by November, 2009.

Hands should be cleaned before preparing food, eating, touching one's face and after coughing or sneezing, using the toilet and after handling soiled material.

Wash your hands with soap and water, or use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Cough or sneeze into your sleeve rather than your hand.

Do not touch your eyes, nose, or mouth after shaking hands or touching hard surfaces like counters and door handles or other surfaces that may contain influenza and other viruses.

2. **Identify and isolate ill students, staff** or others quickly.

Parents/guardians, staff, volunteers, and students should be provided with basic information on the recognition of ILI. Parents/guardians, teachers and other staff should monitor the health of their children/students daily or more often for ILI.

School staff should be prepared to **quickly isolate students/staff who become ill with ILI at school** in a room separated from others with adequate supervision until they can go home. Avoid transmission by practicing excellent hand and respiratory etiquette, and maintaining 2 metres distance from the ill individual as much as possible. Masks are not recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada because individuals lack the necessary training in their safe use.

Students ill with ILI should be sent home with a parent or guardian, not on the school bus. If a bus must be taken, the student should be separated from others and should cover their cough with a tissue or cough/sneeze into their sleeve.

Individuals ill with ILI should stay at home until they are free of symptoms and feeling well, and are able to fully participate in all normal school activities.

In school settings where a large proportion of children have underlying medical conditions that put them at high risk for severe illness or complications from pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza virus, symptomatic children should stay isolated at home for 7 days after onset of symptoms or until all symptoms have resolved, whichever is longer.

Schools with **special needs** students who have a tracheostomy, use nebulizers or metered dose inhalers, the same recommendations apply when they become ill with ILI. Isolate the ill student in a separate area and make arrangements for the parent or guardian to take the student home. As these students may be more at risk for complications, they may be advised to seek medical attention depending on the severity of their illness and their pre-existing conditions.

3. Carry out **frequent environmental cleaning**.

Clean high touch surfaces (e.g., doorknobs, hand rails, faucet handles, computer keyboards, telephones) **at least twice daily** to prevent transmission of the virus from person to person through contaminated hands.

Use regular commercial cleaning products according to product instructions.

Provide adequate numbers of garbage receptacles in classrooms and hallways, and empty garbage at least daily.

4. **Monitor for and report outbreaks** of respiratory illness.

Continue to report school absences of more than 10% to public health using regular communication channels.

Public Health will investigate the causative agent, and will advise on control measures as required.

Follow the recommendations of Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW). AHW's booklet, Influenza Self Care: It's in Your Hands, on influenza self care and precautions can be found at

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/InfluenzaSelfCare.pdf>

- Q. Do we need to wear masks around those who are sick?
- A. No, in considering the school setting where people are not typically trained in the proper use of masks and considering the potential risk of infection associated with improper mask use, the use of masks in the school/daycare setting is not recommended.
- Q. Do students who have been ill with H1N1 symptoms require a doctor's note before returning to school?
- A. No. From a public health perspective, a doctor's note is not required. Students should be symptom free and are feeling well and able to fully participate in all normal day to day school activities.
- Q. Will a vaccine be available?
- A. An H1N1 vaccine is expected to be ready for release in November, 2009. The Governments of Canada and Alberta have purchased enough to provide it to those who want or need it. Further information on how the vaccine will be provided will be available in the fall.

Closures / Cancellations

- Q. Will schools be closed in response to the H1N1 influenza virus?
- A. The Public Health Agency of Canada does not recommend proactive school closures, even when a confirmed H1N1 case exists. Widespread proactive school closures as a control measure have the potential of coming at high economic and social costs since this would impact the many families that have one or both parents working outside of the home. This decision is supported by Alberta Education, Alberta Health & Wellness and Alberta Health Services.
- Local reactive school closures, however, may occur under the Public Health Act. AHS, in consultation with AHW and school authorities may direct school closures if the health or safety of students and staff is endangered. In making a decision for local closure of schools public health officials and school/child care administrations should take into account considerations such as the impact of school absenteeism and/or staff shortages on safe school or child care operations while balancing these factors against the goal of minimizing social disruption & child safety.

Q. Should field trips or sports events be cancelled?

A. No. From a public health perspective, there is no reason for field trips or sports events to be cancelled at this time. School authorities should contact AHW and AHS for ongoing direction in this regard.

Q. Could class schedules be adjusted to compensate for school closures?

A. In consultation with Alberta Education, school authorities could consider schedule changes to compensate for school closures

Q. Could diploma and provincial achievement examination schedules be altered because of school closures?

A. Yes. Provincial examination schedules may be altered or suspended due to school closures or if resources are insufficient to administer the examinations. This decision would be made by Alberta Education, in consultation with jurisdiction officials. Alberta Education has processes in place to address events that may impact administration of provincial examinations to students. In the event of a mild to moderate pandemic, exam processes will not change significantly. Provincial examinations will only be cancelled in the event of a severe pandemic.

Notification

Q. Do schools have a responsibility to report a single H1N1 case to public health or to parents?

A. The protocol around the reporting of H1N1 cases in schools has been changed and schools will not be notified of individual cases of H1N1 in their students and staff as was initially done in spring 2009. As a result it is not recommended that School Authorities contact public health or parents when individual or small groups of H1N1 are identified. Under a new protocol, whenever there is greater than 10% absenteeism due to illness in the school setting, public health will investigate and recommend preventive measures to the school. Public Health will work with the School Authority to notify the school community and to outline the appropriate preventive measures.

Funding

Q. Would funding continue if schools were closed or used for other emergency services such as triage centres?

A. Yes. Alberta Education would continue funding to pay for on-going costs such as utilities, central office costs, and contracted services including bus contracts that were in place prior to the closure. School authorities may be asked to justify expenditures. Those expenditures that are related to emergency response are covered through sustainability funding.

Preparedness

Q. What is Alberta Education doing to prepare school authorities for a possible pandemic?

A. To provide direct support to school boards regarding pandemic influenza, Alberta Education and the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) are working together to ensure school authorities have support in creating policies and procedures. Alberta Education, in consultation with Alberta Health and Wellness, prepared the *Pandemic Planning Guide for Alberta School Authorities* to assist school authorities in preparing staff, students, and parents for a crisis situation. Alberta Education has also produced a document entitled *H1N1 Communications Toolkit for Schools* which is included in the *Alberta Education – Back to School Information Kit –2009/2010*. This document addresses questions from students, staff and parents regarding the virus and provides general guidelines, administrator and parent information packages and updates from Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness.

Q. Are any Alberta Health and Wellness (AHW) plans in place for a pandemic outbreak?

A. Yes. AHW has produced the *Alberta Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health System*. AHW has also worked with Alberta Municipal Affairs to produce Alberta's Pandemic Influenza Operations Plan. Links to both plans are included below.

Alberta Pandemic Influenza Operations Plan

http://aema.alberta.ca/documents/APIOP_May_13_08_revised.pdf

Alberta Pandemic Influenza Plan for the Health System

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/AlbertaPandemicInfluenzaPlanHC.pdf>

Q. Does Alberta Health Services (AHS) have general health emergency plans in place to cope with a pandemic?

A. Yes. AHS has detailed health emergency response plans that address the delivery of health services, including vaccine when available. Please refer to the AHS website for more detailed information. Please check the website <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/> regularly for updates to plans.

Q. What is Alberta Education doing to ensure that student learning will not be greatly impacted by a school closure during a pandemic?

A. Alberta Education has provided several learning supports to ensure students have access to learning.

Support 1. School Authorities are able to access free distance learning materials digitally through the Tools4Teachers.ca website.

Support 2. Parents can work with children to support their learning using the resources available through government websites and those that may have been provided by the child's teacher, school or School Authority.

Support 3. Parents can purchase learning resources from the Learning Resources Centre and access information on specialized services for students with visual loss.

Support 4. Parents may be able to register their child to take courses from the Alberta Distance Learning Centre.

SUPPORT 1 - Digital Resource Support Available

www.tools4teachers.ca - The Tools4Teachers website contains HTML files, PDF files, multimedia objects, video segments, audio clips, and other K -12 resources to download. These items can be used to support children's learning.

SUPPORT 2 - Access to Resources:

<http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/connection/oct2007.aspx>

- www.learnalberta.ca - The LearnAlberta Web site provides access to digital resources to support teaching and learning. Students and parents can enter the site with full access to all resources, using the jurisdiction's username and password. Parents and students can access almost the entire site when entering as a guest.
- This website offers curriculum handbooks for parents.
<http://education.alberta.ca/parents/resources/handbook.aspx>
<http://education.alberta.ca/francais/parents/resources/handbook.aspx>

These sites offer in-depth curricula information and specify what a student should know by the end of each course.

- English programming: <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program.aspx>
- French programming: <http://education.alberta.ca/francais.aspx>

SUPPORT 3 - Purchase from the Learning Resources Centre

www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca -- The Learning Centre provides a wide array of learning and teaching resources that support the Alberta curriculum and enhance learning in the classroom and at home. Parents can review and purchase learning resources online. This website also has information on the Specialized Services for Students with Visual Impairments (SSVI) form more information contact:

Learning Resources Centre (LRC)

12360-142 Street

Edmonton, Alberta T5L 4X9

Web site: www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca

E-mail: lrccustserv@gov.ab.ca

Telephone (780) 427-2767; Select Option 1-1 (Toll-free in Alberta by first dialing 310-0000)

Fax (780) 422-9750.

SUPPORT 4 – Enrolment in Distributed or Distance Learning

Alberta Education develops online distributed learning resources; however, the delivery of these courses is handled by school authorities. Your school authority may be able to determine if all of your high school courses can be completed in an online program.

Alternatively, distance learning may be available from distance learning providers such as the Alberta Distance Learning Centre, depending on availability of resources and capacity of the school. Courses may be available in print, online, and blended formats. Through the distance learning provider, students can access learning resources and teacher support. Assignments are completed and then submitted for evaluation and feedback.

During a moderate or severe pandemic outbreak, it is anticipated the Alberta Distance Learning Centre will have capacity limitations, so the Centre may choose to respond first to student needs at the grade 12 level.

- Q. [How should schools manage any Joint Use Agreements sometimes called Memorandums of Agreements \(MOU's that exist between school authorities and municipalities?\)](#)
- A. Alberta Education encourages school authorities, as part of their business Continuity Planning and Pandemic Planning, to review their Joint Use Agreements with municipalities to consider the ramifications that an H1N1 event might have on the provision of services or facilities and to plan and communicate contingency measures that may need to be taken in the event of a spike in H1N1 influenza in the community.

Attendance

- Q. [How would schools manage if 30% of staff were absent?](#)
- A. Staffing assignments would continue to be a decision of each school authority.
- Q. [If staff members are unable to work because family members are ill with pandemic influenza, will they still receive salary?](#)
- A. It is the responsibility of the school authority human resources staff to communicate necessary information to staff.

More Information

Q. Where do we direct parents who are phoning the school / school division for more information?

A. Parents can call Alberta Health Link:

In Edmonton, call 780-408-LINK (5465); in Calgary, call 403-943-LINK (5465).

In other parts of Alberta, call Health Link Alberta toll free at 1-866-408-LINK (5465).

For more information regarding self care, they can visit

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-self-care.html>

<http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/influenza-easy-to-understand.html>

Q. Who should school authorities contact for additional consultation about pandemic planning?

A. School authorities are encouraged to work closely with local Public Health and municipal organizations regarding influenza preparedness planning.

For AHS general inquiries please call 780-342-2000 or Alberta toll free at 1-866-408 5465 (LINK)

The Alberta Education contact for matters related to pandemic planning is Dan Ferguson, Workforce Planning Branch, and he can be reached at 780-422-4604 or dan.ferguson@gov.ab.ca.

Source: Public Health Guidance for Child Care Programs and Schools (K to grade 12) regarding the Prevention and Management of Influenza-Like-illness (ILI), including the Pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza Virus May 3, 2009 - 16:00 EST Updated: August 19, 2009